

## A WAKE FOR THE LIVING

BY ANDREW LYTTLE

NOW that I have come to live in the sense of eternity, I can tell my girls who they are. They are the rare and precious objects of my delight. But this is not enough. Two of them already prefer to be the delight of another. In either case this is a personal and individual matter, and their being concerns more than that. The sense of eternity gives a perspective on things and events which makes for a refreshing clarity. I don't care how many rabbits jump over my grave, they don't make me shiver. But I always speak courteously to them when we meet. The rabbit is the great African hero, just as the monkey performs for China. Perhaps our colored nurses instilled in us respect for this hero. Tommy Bagley will turn his car around and go another way rather than cross the path of so great a one, when his headlights happen to startle him in the road, and my father had had told him as a child all the Uncle Remus stories. This was a rich world for a child's education, but this was not the whole of it. I rather think that a country society, which ours was and is no more, by its habits and customs discovers the identity between the natural and the supernatural, that mystery which becomes ceremony to people who make their living by the land or sea.

If you don't know who you are or where you come from, you will find yourself at a disadvantage. The ordered slums of Suburbia are made for the confusion of the spirit. Those who live in units called homes or estates—both words do violence to the language—don't know who they are nor where they are from. How can they? They are from nowhere and belong to nothing. For belief they substitute abstractions and the half-lies of advertisement. For the profound stress between the union that is

flesh and spirit they have exchanged the appetites. This describes the secular man—that is, the half-man—who inhabits what is left of Christendom. The woman is neither worldly nor spiritual. She is the vessel of life. Hence substance is a familiar mystery to her. She may sell herself and never be bought. She may do and be many things. One thing she will not do: accept an abstraction as having anything to do with the business of living. Whatever life is, it manifests itself through substance. During the Revolution in western North Carolina, when a party of Tories was plundering the Daniel Jackson house near Fairforest creek, Miss Nancy Jackson kicked one loaded with plunder down the stairs. She was not thinking of Mr. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence when she did it, I imagine; nor did those mountain men have his fine words on their lips as they annihilated the English and Tories and killed Ferguson at King's Mountain. The mountain's name had no grander origin than a man named King, but it marks a turning point in the civil war which the American Revolution was. The war of 1861-65 was the real revolution: the new men of the North and West destroyed the old union of states in the name of preserving it. We hear much of our independence but little of the murder that was the common play between the Whigs and the Tories, particularly in North and South Carolina. These were the same race of people, with the same hardships and frontier experiences in common. How could this be? It is a part of our history and must be understood, else we fail in a crucial knowledge about what has made us and, perhaps, lost us.

If we dismiss the past as dead and not as a country of the living which our eyes are unable to see, as we cannot see a foreign country but know it is there, then we are likely to become servile: we will have nothing with which to resist tyranny. Living as we will be in a lesser sense of ourselves, lacking that fuller knowledge which only the living past can give, it will be so easy to submit to pressure and receive what is already ours as a boon from authority. The Incas understood this. They had an invariable rule of con-

quest: to bring back to Cuzco the gods and young chieftains as hostages. The conquered gods became the courtiers of the Sun and the young caciques learned Quechua. Atahualpa, the Inca who lost to Pizarro, was carried to his doom in an elaborate palanquin with the Lord of Chinca at his feet. To lose your language and your god surrenders all that you are, no matter how many grand abstract words like liberty (you can be at liberty: it is not a state) try to reassure you that you are something. Or that you have something to lose. Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, man can little effect. God gives and takes life away. I have spoken of liberty, but the pursuit of happiness is the most heartlessly delusive of all. It is impossible to keep this as an end and pursue it; but if it were possible, it would be impossible to attain it. It is another version of the promise in the Garden: Eat of this fruit and you will live as the gods. To pursue in such a way is to destroy. Look at the pagan myths as well as this of the Garden, that pre-Christian and universal myth. Those moments we have of joy—I don't dare tamper with happiness now—come from the heart and out of it make their discoveries which are willing sacrifices, for we know Who resides at the center there.

Language has many branches, but surely its origin was the praise of God and awe before His works. We know now so much about primitive societies and their mythologies, their changes and growth, that one could soon get lost in the ramifications of descent. I want to make a grand leap in time and say that the stable force of the state is the family, in our world at least. This may seem a platitude, but wait. Its form is the most perfect for man in his fallen condition. In its private life the family is a whole with members and connections as differing parts, while publicly it is a unit in a larger whole, the state. In Middle Tennessee the state was more particularly felt through the county. It still is so, if less intelligently. The Court House was the county's seat, just as the family had its seat in its dwelling, usually by a spring or

upon a high knob or hill. A high seat has a value beyond use, but water was a necessity and a hill was sometimes a good defense against the Indians. The two values were not contradictory; they complemented each other. In the Court House a man did his public business; at home his private business. The private and public acts were separate and yet defined the individual. The front door is the symbol for both: what went on behind it was domestic and intimate; before it lay the world, and the division the threshold made was known to all and respected. Beyond the door decorum demanded circumspection and regard. Our grandfathers knew that to confuse the two was to return to chaos, that frightening view just beyond Paradise. Not to know the difference between the public thing, the *res publica*, and the intimate is to surrender that delicate balance of order which alone makes the state a servant and not the people servants of the state.

Then there is always the complication, sometimes threat, of bringing the stranger into the house. He would of necessity be a disrupting force, except for manners. If he stays too long, then manners become strained. But he must be invited in, lest we turn away from the door God's messenger. Old General White of Huntsville was a good example of how the stranger may enter and give to the social and family intimacies their limits. He was a man of parts and in certain ways too great an individualist. He preferred, for example, not to join the Confederacy but to fight the invaders on his own. Perhaps this was not too individual after all, but his way of keeping to his political principles and at the same time defending his home; for as a young man he was a great favorite of Henry Clay's, and was in the room with Clay when he died. He was also my brother-in-law James Darwin's great-grandfather. There is a picture of him on the wall in what used to be the front bedroom in his granddaughter's house in Huntsville. The rooms and halls are filled with ancestral portraits and copies of famous paintings celebrating Her Ladyship the Virgin and the Court of Heaven. These were done by



Miss Mattie, Jim's mother, who was a miniaturist until her eyes gave out and she could only see to do the larger things. She was not only a lover and defender of the arts; she also understood what a small fragment time is before things eternal, and so lived her ninety ageless years with grace and charity and fortitude.

General White hangs upon her wall, a photograph, not a painting. He is very old and very beautiful, white-haired and moustached, a velvet cap askew back of his forehead, leaning slightly forward on his cane. He looks like a doll who has been balanced by a careful hand. He might have been arranged by his great-granddaughter Martha, who made portrait dolls; or dressed by her sister Mary Beirne, descendant of that O'Beirne sister of Cardinal Plunkett whom Cromwell hanged in Ireland. What a wonderful comfort to know that your ancestors were enemies of Satan's minion. Upon the wall he leans forward, brushed and groomed. Light slips about his blacked slippers; the velveteen coat and unpressed trousers of the period would easily fit a youth, but no youth could impart his air of effortless grace and authority. This comes to a focus in the eyes. They see but do not look out. There is nothing about them, flat and colorless, to mar the formality of the pose. The bird dog at his feet, old now and fat from lying about the house, as he looks up at his master, betrays that perfect respect and love of a long intimacy and great actions over and done with.

"Dear Papa" the General was called in his prime; and in his prime, to withdraw somewhat from the domestic adulation, he set down a sawmill at Scottsboro, Alabama, coming home on the week-ends to visit his wife and children. He boarded during the week with a childless couple who greatly admired him. One can only guess how too much they made him at home, for one day the husband called him aside and, confessing how they despaired of having an heir, proposed that he, the General, do the honors. General White replied, "I will be compelled to decline the honor, but I will be glad to smoke your pipe."

Nor were the ladies in the family without understanding of these matters, although one might say that their judgments were somewhat tart. When a young cousin came home from out West, bringing a bride back, they eyed her carefully. Although it was clear her ways were not the ways of Huntsville, she was received with kindness. However, one of the older women of the connection was heard to say she supposed in the West a man might mistake calico for silk.

It is no wonder that every Southern man of family is careful to say he outmarried himself. He can pretend it is a matter of courtesy, but it has become a convention and a convention with teeth in it. Ann Taylor Lytle, the fourth daughter of Captain William Lytle, our common ancestor in Tennessee, was born in 1795. The only thing we know about her is that she stepped down and married Mr. Tilford and took to dipping snuff. Apparently on the frontier women could smoke a pipe, but dipping was another matter. Nobody but the women in a family could have kept this kind of information alive for so long. Any threat to the family, in either its economy or status, was particularly the woman's business. The man stood forth as the seeming head, but the family was ruled from that back room, sometimes called the chamber, where the grandmother sat and handed down her domestic decisions, about when to go barefooted, when to take off the winter underwear, all the while she was matching pieces for quilts or sewing up rips in clothes, laying these aside for such matters as going to the store-room with her keys "to give out provisions" for the day's meals. Mammy, my father's mother, was strongly opposed to women's voting. Her instincts were sound in this, for it threatened women's status in the family rule. "Besides," she said, "you've got to let the men do something."

But it was not Mammy who occupied that back room where I was mostly brought up. It was Mama, my grandmother Nelson, who gave me the sense of permanence which only love can give, that total and absolute love which asks nothing in return. I was

born in the blue room above her room, and, as the only grandchild for many years, was allowed the liberty of calling my grandparents what I heard their children call them. And indeed I might have been a younger child. Not so with Mammy. She addressed me as "Grandson". She must have, but I don't ever remember her calling me by my Christian name, even though I was named for her second husband, Mr. Andrew Alexander. This formality was the distinction between town and country, and it was family pride which you find only where the family is attached to land and remains attached. After Millbrook was sold and Mammy moved to town, I used to pass her house on my way to school. It was a mile and a half walk, and I was running late and bent over with satchels and lunch. If she caught me, she always called out, although I was on the other side of the street, "Hold your head up, Grandson. You'll grow up as bent as your Uncle Van." He had had enough to bend him, but she knew that the greater the sorrow the stiffer the back. And he knew it, too, because he happened to overhear her once. Afterwards, as he approached her house, he could be seen abruptly straightening his shoulders.

Mama never would have raised her voice to call across the street. She was too shy and too full of the sense of town decorum ever to let the town in any way impinge upon her privacy. To walk the two blocks to the square for shopping was always an adventure, and she never walked it alone. In the early days of my childhood no woman went to town on Saturdays, for there would be drinking and sometimes shooting. But Mama was particularly careful of never making herself publicly conspicuous. She was made for domestic rule and its felicities. I've heard her say she thought the Lytles were crazy, and then laugh in an apologetic way. Actually there was no cultural rift between Murfreesboro and the county whose seat it was. To call town life bourgeois then would be a false definition. People had cows and horses and gardens in town, and the streets were always full, especially on first Mondays, with teams and wagons, mules,

horses, animals brought in for trade or sale. That's what the town was for, a place for the country to do its business in most easily. Even in this matter of carriage: my sister Polly told me that Mama frequently admonished her to bend her neck. Polly never quite knew what this meant, she says—quite how to bend it to make it hold up. Mama would also ask her, "What young gentleman is calling on you this evening?" And when Polly would speak a name, she would shake her head and sigh, "The bottom plank is on the top now." Her instructions to me as a boy: "Let your tongue be pulled out by the roots before you lie." These admonitions always made a hiatus; it was as if she stopped whatever she was usually doing, seized by these moral saws; then, having spoken them, resumed her full and loving life. She never seemed old, even when she was old. Her eyes were softly radiant and her walk light and brisk. It is hard to imagine parents and grandparents young as you are young; and yet I can see her, without impropriety, the bride Papa took to Thibodaux, Louisiana, to make a rice crop on his father's place, Arcadia, how reckless and gay she was, pregnant and galloping side-saddle through the parish, with the old women shaking their fingers at her as she passed.

Maybe her moral axioms—I don't remember too many—made a real part of her, because it was from her I got my first sense of the damaging power of evil. It was all in her voice as she reprimanded me for burning paper on Sunday, one of those paper balloons you used to make rise by setting them afire. Maybe it was this; maybe it was just paper I was burning, for I did set the house on fire once in some imaginary game with candles. (Awfully incriminating, this.) I can see now her reproof came from the fear of social disapproval; but then I could not distinguish it from her unshaken belief in men's depravity. This depravity generally had to do with their carnal natures. She and Aunt Tene, her sister, often disagreed on genealogical matters, but they were united on one thing. "That's all they think about,"

one of them would say, and the other would always agree. Except that Aunt Tene did not limit her disapproval to men. She had watched with suspicion the too flagrant courtship of the preacher's son by a lady in the choir; and, after they were married, and the evening train had travelled what she thought was the proper distance, she laid down the *Nashville Banner*, saying, "I wonder if she has raped him yet?"

In their eyes males could not begin too early their fallen ways. Nor was I spared. "What were you two doing in that upstairs room?" Mama would say. What we were doing was the most innocent play. I had been reading about Sleeping Beauty and the thorny hedge, and this playmate and I were re-enacting it. We spent hours bedecking the couch with roses and wild flowers, and in the game naturally she had to pretend sleep and I had to play my part. My grandmother saw a more literal play and, suspecting what she would call "the worst", questioned me most pointedly. The imaginative world we had made disappeared into its material parts and I carried that day and the next the heaviest load of sin, all the more powerful because I didn't understand it. The next day was a Protestant Sunday and there were no sheaves gathered in so far as I was concerned. Nor did going to the country with Jesse Beesley and his family to spend the day help any. The landscape and the turnpike appeared in great particularity. I had never seen any of it before; I had merely ridden over it, bored with the adult world and wishing the horses would go faster so we could get there and play. But that Sunday I sensed what the world was, the threat it was to innocence and that perfect concord the family communion establishes and maintains. My greatest distress was a sense of betrayal. Nor was this the first time. At eighteen months I was sent to the country to be weaned. My Aunt Lady kept me; and I was perfectly happy there, as I would always be, until I returned and saw my mother. I realized at once what she had done to me, and burst into tears.

So it seems in some ways I was more Nelson than Lytle, for provender, whether from a woman's breast or out of a corn-field, in the country took on a simpler, perhaps more commonplace meaning. It was believed by women that so long as they were nursing a child they couldn't get pregnant. I know nothing of this mystery, except to say my father was well over eighteen months before he was weaned. He was too big to hold and so stood on a little stool, where he could get at it with more ease, and nurse away with a little derby hat on his head. I told Hatton Harrison about this, and Hatton said, "He was such a gentleman I know he tipped it when he got done."

It's the quiet of Murfreesboro I remember best. And the even pace of the town, broken regularly by the violence of the train coming into the station, the bell clanging and the rails sinking a little before the wheels, and you had to stand back lest you be sucked under. A pause in its flight, the engine stood impatiently, and its metallic pants scattered the smell of oily steam and cinders. The very cries of welcome and farewell, the loading and unloading, told you it would not tarry. And out of the steam the "All Aboard", sharp and vaporous. But already the wheels were hissing; they spun; then slowly and invincibly they caught the rails, turning, turning out of sight the train on its way to unknown parts. Then that moment of nostalgia, until the vacuum it left filled slowly again with the quiet familiar air, as the hacks drove away with their fares, stirring a slight dust, the tired hooves clicking a rock, now and then. Or that domestic sound, the wild-cat siren blowing for a fire. Its familiarity made it all the more thrilling, for if we were lucky we could see the heavy fire-horses galloping, as groomed as kept women, the black smoke rolling out of the upright engine boiler. Each night, at nine o'clock, it blew the curfew and all lurking children had to be off the streets. And instinctively each householder looked towards the blinds, turned his eyes towards the firelight.

We all seemed to move, to meet and part, as ourselves among ourselves. We went at our natural gaits, as my father would say, although he chose horses whose gaits were as fast as fast could be. He would dance all night in town and drive Lunette the ten miles to Millbrook at a fast trot, throw a blanket over her, and be in the fields by sun-up to get things started for the day. A real farmer never forgets the unplacable seasons. People took long strolls, or the young girls my mother's age would go for a drive in the barouche and rarely get old Butler out of a walk. The noise we suffer today was absent. You could see and hear, and smell and touch and taste; and the world was always there, immovable, constant, and you were in it. The young and old alike talked about the only thing there was to talk about, themselves, their companions, their secrets and social doings. Of course business was done, but the general interest was the inexhaustible complexities of the actions of human beings, not statistics about people in mass, but persons as they behaved to one another.

This could be cruel as well as beneficent, or this could turn near-disaster into farce. Mammy and my grandfather Lytle, his brother Uncle Van and his wife, Aunt Kate Van, a Bibb from Alabama, and Doctor Patterson and his wife who was a Lytle and the one sister who kept peace among the three sets of children of this branch of the family—all of these together took the cars for Nashville to see the Blackfriars, a highly-touted theatrical company of the day. The men had had their cheer; and Uncle Van, a little man like his brother, entered the theatre strutting, almost ready to crow. Aunt Kate Van, as I said, was a Bibb, a big woman, descendant of the first territorial and the first state governor of Alabama. The Bibbs were gifted and proud and knew how to build imposing and beautiful houses to make clear their station and pride. Aunt Kate Van held her head high. Unfortunately she had the palsy, and her head shook in a kind of balanced rhythm which fascinated me as a child. I

could never quite hold her eye, and the sound of her voice seemed to scatter. One day I greeted her, "Good day, Mrs. Lytle." This created a family scandal. How cruel this was and how careless had been my Aunt Mary and my mother discussing something they disapproved of in Aunt Kate Van's household, in front of a child, for I was a loyal child and took the meaning of their gossip for what the adult world could not. I did not think; I could only feel, and my feelings responded to what I thought my mother would want of me. But then I seem always to have been around, playing on the hearth, or sitting in the corner for some misdemeanor, hoping the door bell would ring so I could jump up and answer it and be free; at any rate overhearing far more than I should have. Aunt Kate Van had a grief, and great courage. The palsy made the perfect symbol for her. Her head would be perpetually shaken, but she would hold it up.

The disgrace had not happened that evening when Uncle Van sidled down the aisle and took a seat not his own. The ticket holder arrived to protest. It suited him very well, Uncle Van replied. The usher, the manager, all in his party, did their best to persuade him to take his right seat, and he replied, "I am very well situated here." It was making a scene. People were growing restive and twisting their necks, Uncle Van more stubborn, when the police arrived. This was another matter. My grandfather rose and drew his pistol. Dr. Patterson drew his; people began to dive under seats. Mammy saw the nonsense had gone far enough. She arose and picked Uncle Van up and sat him down beside her. In this company Mammy was called Kate Bob to distinguish her from her sister-in-law, Kate Van. They were both big, able women, and the size I rather think made for and solved the situation. If Aunt Kate Van had tried to pick him up, I don't believe the curtain would have gone up that evening.

In those days Murfreesboro was a real community, just as Columbia or Woodbury or Lebanon, or even Nashville, was. A public gathering concentrated, by humorously discussing its mem-



bers, what went on all the time, on the square, at church, just any place people got together. A community is not defined best by drives to raise money for impersonal alms-giving, miscalled charity. These professional organizations give money to people they never see, collected from people they do not know. They do nothing to help the poor and bereft make a living. A terrifying sign of the family's doom, maybe, is clearly set forth in "homes" for the aged and invalids, perhaps even more in the "baby-sitters". Children in the horse-and-buggy days went along with their parents and slept in wagons or together in beds, while their parents danced all night in the next room. Or there were servants and maiden kin who kept the house and did their part for their keep, although they were never allowed, or rarely so, to be conscious of being beholden. Because they weren't: the family was a whole. In a way old maids and old bachelors were the strength of the family. They were the visible sign that man and woman and child are not enough. They stand for warning, too, that some turn out with better luck than others; and this reaffirms the family's strength and self-perpetuating habits.

To relieve another's sorrow or to put bread into his mouth is a fearful responsibility, binding both parties. We have forgotten that to give even a crust of bread is to give yourself; and this is done out of the common responsibility Christians must have towards one another. The selfish thought that the need of the giver may one day be as urgent does not necessarily accompany that act. Reformers cannot stand the facts of living. Their sense of guilt and depravity is too deep. So they try to ignore by hiding or removing from sight the ugly necessities. I was in the death cell of a colored man once shortly before he was led away to the chair, he and I and a superannuated Methodist preacher, known for the length and inadequacy of his prayers. Prisoners in the process of escaping welcomed them. The only outside windows to the prison in Nashville were at that time in the chapel. It was poorly lighted to begin with. The long prayers and a soaped

file worked well together. I had no real business in that cell, nor did the old preacher have any true sense of his office. It was my first experience with the confusion between the public and private thing, so prevalent today that nobody recognizes the usurpation of each by each, compounding disorder.

The man about to be electrocuted was a big man. He was true black and he glistened like a piece of silk. His trapped eyes darted and struck at the bars, until I could feel the cell shrink. He did not listen to the empty and ineffectual words, although he would pause briefly, out of the habit of manners, or with a flicker of inward surprise, to wonder how others could be free of his terrible preoccupation.

Death in the electric chair, hidden away, is meaningless as punishment, except in a way to the small community in the prison itself, and the prisoners never witness it, only feel the psychic shock, and without the sense to embody this shock it quickly evaporates, leaving the memory blank. He would have been comforted in the old sense of being strengthened, I thought afterwards, if he could have mounted the scaffold in his own community, with the curious and the friendly and his kin as witnesses; even make his apology; stand as the example of what is in every man regardless of race or station; be the warning as he is the victim of man's nature. This is the only true democracy, the democracy of manhood: to belong to nature and human nature, under God, where the only equality is our criminal or fallen condition, as our only hope is to be reprieved by the Word. The criminal facing this final moment, as he makes his apology, assures us that we have heard and witnessed a fragment of the truth. King Henry feared the truth of Sir Thomas More's language and ordered him not to make too long an apology from the scaffold. More accepted the challenge, and his words went instantly about Europe: "I die my King's good servant, but God's first." The threat of a public hanging—and it must be witnessed to keep it a threat—is good for the morale and the morals of a

community. Afterwards all suffer that drop, the depression of feeling which accompanies the revelation of an insoluble truth. Afterwards people will speak carefully, walk quietly, and a certain house will have its blinds drawn or door shut and imitate vacancy. Not until the following day does the pace of life resume its usual fluctuations.

I suppose this is the great crime against mankind: that things and machines usurp human needs and acts, that it is the electric chair so frightening in its abstract power we think of and not the man dying. In his apprenticeship Satan tempted Our Lord with the kingdoms of this world. He is more skillful these days. Of all the mortal sins he at last has picked upon the one which serves him best—sloth. The machine has given to sloth precedence even over pride. Take your ease: the machine will do it. This, as we are learning, leads to the full definition of *accidia*, that most difficult of all our sins to understand. Sloth is merely the outward and obvious appearance of *accidia*, which might be said to be the soul, woolly and fat with fungi, unable to fear damnation, uninterested in damnation as well as hope for grace. Even uninterested is too strong a word. To find nothing in nature or human nature to tempt or arouse the slightest appetite, or want, or love of self or others, or the seasons' gifts—this, not Pride, is the final affront to God.

When I was very small, we lived in the Parrish house. It was an old-fashioned brick dwelling, two stories, with a porch of four square columns above and below. It didn't run the length of the house but covered the entrance commodiously. The upstairs porch was railed in, so that neither cat nor dog nor child could fall through. I have a clear memory of standing on this upper porch in my nightshirt, in the dark, watching the fire engine walking back from a fire. It had been raining, but only large drops fell from the roof into the moist night, all glistening with darkness, bringing the mystery of action spent but still threaten-

ing. I was eating Cuticura, a salve my mother used for healing all my cuts and burns. To be eating this, at just this time, must have been very bad; but we were living then before the general knowledge of Freud and Jung, and nobody seemed to think anything of it. I also ate clay. My colored playmates taught me this. It had a chalky flavor with some pungency, but the salve tasted tasteless, though soft and glistening.

I cannot tell even now why that moment seemed so portentous to a child. It was almost as if I were in exile—I would not have known the word—but there I stood, absolutely alone, surrounded by some magic circle, beyond which lay a waste of emptiness. That night and two other times I suffered experiences which, as I look back, were clear warnings that I should be condemned to live the life of imagination. I had no language to understand what was happening. My sense of it spoke to me through an immense feeling by means of which those sunken forces were assaulting the essential, unchanging self, neither child nor man. I felt this as I felt enlarged and surrounded. It was mysterious and ambiguous, but it brought no fear.

One morning I came down to breakfast and there was no bacon. I suppose this was after Anse had taken Della, our cook, back to the country. Della exuded kindness and sang well in church. When her clear pure voice rose above the others, the preacher called out, "Who is that Sister?" Before next Sunday Anse said he needed her at home. There was such amity between my mother and Della, who seemed always smiling and glad to do what she had to do, although I'm sure my father put pressure on her to come to town. At the turn of the century the structure of our society had not changed too much. The so-called Bourbons had politically recovered control, and the state of things had all the appearance of stability. A great lot of the colored people who had been born into slavery were still around; and everybody, black and white, had been born into a common life of earning their bread by the sweat of the brow and all the attend-

ant tasks and professions which evolved from this. Many of the bosses—it was no longer Master—knew what it was to take a hand at hard labor, even if it seemed unwise to practice this. I always liked to get my hands in the dirt and do menial tasks. This disturbed my father. It seemed to him to disturb the balance of order. “I’ve farmed all my life,” he told me, “and never had a plow in my hands.” But he would run delicate machinery, and a man told me just the other day, who must have been a child and overheard his elders talk, that my father drove the wagon when corn was gathered. To keep the hands moving, he drove so fast it was said he left half his crop in the field. It’s hard to change the rhythm of country work, and the protest came by way of humorous comment. It is unfortunate that the word “Master”, certainly in the South, goes with slavery. This distorts its meaning. Its meaning is Christian, the master of a craft. The head of a farm in England, or any head, was the master. He was the one with the finished knowledge of things, responsible for their care and execution. I don’t know where “boss” came from—the Eastern cities no doubt, as it may be a corruption of the Dutch *baas*, which is “master”. At any rate it does not imply any craft.

The mind did not work alone, nor was the hand an automatic adjunct to the machine. The hand and the mind and the foot all worked together, as parts of a whole. You had to outwit the seasons and unseasonable weather or the elements, such as fire and flood, when they got out of hand. There were people first of all, then tools and machines, instruments which required intelligent use and management. The second man at a sawmill was the fireman. It took great art to know how to stoke the boiler, to keep the steam up and turn the saw until its teeth looked like whirling water. When things were going well, a friendly rivalry rose between sawyer and fireman, for people enjoyed their work. The sawyer tried to pull the steam down, and the fireman tried to make it pop off. John Henry was the fireman at the first sawmill my father put down at Guntersville, and when he made the

steam pop off, he would jig out from the boiler where the sawyer could see him. If the log was big and the steam too low, Uncle Peter would push his big belly up against the stick as if he by himself had to keep the log moving. There was injustice, of course, in this society, for what man has stumbled into Paradise? But no matter what his station or place, a man's worth took its measure in all men's eyes. He either failed his station or himself, or he did the best he could; and he was judged, but not always harshly, for no man could reduce to his will the natural world and, falteringly or with zeal, most men in the town and county tried to understand and obey God's will. They might deny it, but they believed.

But that morning Della was back at Millbrook, Mammy's farm on the Hall's Hill pike, and there was no bacon. My mother was a most fierce mother, but not a motherly mother. She was light and gay of spirit and, I believe, among her friends wittily obscene. To her children and certainly to her son, so that her love would not spoil us, at the right times we received her ridicule and never took it amiss. She ran her house; it did not run her. And that morning there was no bacon. For me the order of life was shaken. I stood up and said, "Well, Mama will have some bacon," and still in my nightshirt I ran out of the house.

The Parrish house was caty-cornered to the block where my grandmother lived. First you struck the Will Ransom house. Two brothers, Will and Jim, had married two sisters, daughters of old Major Anderson who had been on Forrest's staff. They lived in amity for years in this one house together and each brother would drink a pitcher of water at a meal. Joining this lot and running to East Main was Mama's house; up Main towards the Square the Mosby house, and around the corner from that the Edwin Keeble house which at that time belonged to the Sparks. The law office of Colonel Keeble had been enlarged into a small dwelling. We lived in it and there my little sister, Molly Graves, died; but at this time Miss Mary Murfree and

Miss Fanny lived there and perhaps on short rations, for her books were no longer selling and there was a discussion in the family at hog-killing time about whether their pride would be hurt if we sent around some spareribs and backbone. My grandfather Nelson remarked that nothing salved pride like a greased belly. Papa lived surrounded by women, his wife's sisters and connections like Aunt Bec Snell, who had a running sore on her leg and adored his oldest child, Hewlett. At times he was known to be politely tart. Sometimes speaking generally but meaning something particular, or just using his speech to protest gently against the ways of the world, he would say out of a general silence, "All old women ought to be taken out of doors and shuck out every morning." His intentions were not misunderstood. Aunt Tene replied, "Well, every old man ought to be stood in a barrel of lye."

The air was soft and the earth warm, as I sped across the dusty street onto the granitoid sidewalk. It must have been May, for I was barefooted and I felt no chill in the ground as you do in April, when you first take off your shoes and stockings. The trees were still and fresh of leaf, and the birds darting or chittering along the boughs, as the great warty hackberry rose up before the stable, marking the spot where the wilderness once hid the ground. The buttercups were up along the borders of walks and flower beds. It was as if all things bound themselves together and kept apart in a perfect balance by the air I could only feel; and, feeling it lift the tails of my shirt as bare-assed I ran, I learned how its touch could quicken and how each sense acting together, on this May day, brought the world whole and alive in all the multiplicity of its members and parts.

Because innocence did not recognize the difference between the public and private distinctions, each object of nature, the green world, each man-made thing seemed another part of my grandmother's house and yard, for she was that certainty of order which would always be. All would be safe with her; rather, nothing

would change, for I had no cause for fear. Sure enough, I rushed into the confusion of after-breakfast clearing-away, people going to work, and she there slightly bemused but as I knew she would be. She sat me down and not only bacon but all the breakfast I could want was put before me. There was none of this burnt toast, but muffins and biscuit. By this time they were a little cold and the grease came out on the edges of the muffins, just enough to make them sweeter.

There were two dining rooms, one in the basement next to the kitchen where the family came down to breakfast. This soon fell out of use, except as a place to keep the tubs and boxes of plants during the winter; but it was to this room I came that morning. Both the kitchen and the dining room were well under ground and dark and crowded, for the arched columns which held the house up stood thickly about. The muted light must have suited Daisy, the cook, those Monday mornings she arrived in a sun-bonnet to hide the bruises and swollen places left by some Saturday night lover. An enclosed stairway led upstairs into the "house". I took it for granted that the kitchen, although in it, was never considered a part of the house. It was Caroline Gordon who reminded me this manner of speaking was a hangover from early days, when the kitchen was a separate building, set apart because of the danger of fire as well as to avoid the odors of food. This bottom part of the house especially took on a richer meaning after I had read about the two little princes in Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, although it was not long before my Aunt Mary took to reading me the plays directly. Cordelia to this day evokes her voice, and Lear is of all the tragic heroes the one I see best.

There was a dumbwaiter to the upstairs dining room and by it a box with brass hands which swung to a number, the room ringing for service. There were all kinds of devices to enhance our communion: Chinese bells to ring us to lunch and dinner, although we called it dinner and supper, after John Greer went



to work at the mill. The tones of these bells were so urgent when my grandmother beat the higher notes rapidly. Then there was a tube from the downstairs rooms to the upstairs which you could blow into and make alert the occupants of the bedrooms and which allowed us to talk through the walls.

This house was as young as I, for Papa had torn the old house down to build it in the first days of his prosperity. It showed the influence of that sentimental Medieval revival for which Ruskin was partly responsible, but only partly, because the nostalgia for what had been lost was widespread in Christendom. It made once functional parts of buildings, such as crenellations, into decoration, not true ornament, which completes the bare structure not only in force and weight but in the spirit of beauty and essential meaning. It is the architecture of a society which most substantially exhibits its soul. Papa's house, I think now, was a protest against the self-consciousness of defeat which prevailed throughout the South, turning tragedy into sentimentality. Papa thought of himself as a self-made man. What he meant was that he would re-establish himself in his own way, with the tools and material at hand. No man makes himself. God allows any man the choice of his possibilities. So it was that Papa's house by its presence decried the inherited architecture. It was built well, but the proportions were not too good, and it was filled with decoration for texture. It was what Edwin Keeble used to call Illinois Renaissance, but to me it was home. At one end of the two-story porch was a tall, cone-shaped, slated top to a tower. It might have been an illustration of towers in fairy tales, except that there was no tower beneath it. It seemed to be held up by an intricacy of jig-sawed pieces of wood. I cannot say it had no use, for the space was round like a table top, and there Mr. Dee Smith and Miss Lula played Flinch with Mama and Papa on those long summer afternoons when there wasn't much to do. Not only did it suggest something Medieval but it had that elaboration of detail which was faintly Eastern: colored glass,

tiles, and a fierce, lion-headed sun over the keystone of the arched window in the sitting room, to the side of which a conservatory attached itself. Mr. Will Beard, who courted my Aunt Mary at the same time my father was courting my mother, when asked where he would spend the winter, replied, "In the Doctor's conservatory."

For the doorbell there was a gargoyle, and visitors to announce themselves pushed in its tongue which rang a bell. Behind the door a long hall ran into a stairway which seemed to follow through an endless vista of halls and rooms. Actually a large mirror on the first landing created this illusion. Above the mirror was a large window which lighted the upstairs hall and below, with just enough stained glass in it to make the sun dance and distort the features of guests with streaks of color. From the first landing, as you turned into the next flight, you could pause and lean over a little balcony to flirt or make a posture. A brass Hermes, holding high his electric torch (electricity was so recent this was magic), stood with one winged foot upraised and the other planted firmly on the newel post. During the depression Dr. Gott bought this for twenty-five dollars. It reminded him of his profession, but to us it was the beginning of the dismantlement which time can with such disguise bring about. It is gone, this dwelling which held us all; but I can travel every inch of it; open and close doors, go through the private passages; be sat down again, after coming home from the free school, in an upstairs back hall well out of sight, as Mama combed through my hair looking for boogers, because of the company the public school, or "freese", brought together. There are the crown jewels, a night light sparkling in its niche; the light-heavy tinkle of glass curtains parting before folding doors, while above plaster angels and lilies beside ponds and frogs spewing water upon the painted ceiling crown all this splendor. So it seemed to a child, lying upon the floor and looking upwards. An interior decorator entered the hall and grabbed his head. "I don't see why you don't scream," he said.

The interior decorator was the first specialist to violate the domestic privacy, setting up an arbitrary taste with no regard to the wants and needs of the traditional dwelling. I am quoting from Papa's mother's diary, as she is preparing to occupy the house built for her on Acadia, at Thibodaux: "went to our new house today—after dinner cut out one of the carpets etc. . ." This was Monday, 6th of December, 1852. Later on in the week, "went to our house today made the other carpet and put one down", and again, "went to the house put down another carpet and set up one bedstead . . ." "Sat. 8th: Had headache all day, bitter heart-ache too. We left after dinner had a hard rain—O tis sweet to be at home at our own fireside."

I never saw the first house. It was Mama's inheritance. She was a Nelson and married a Nelson, but I don't think they were any kin. Her father, Joseph, was a druggist and a Jeffersonian Democrat. He didn't believe in banks and brought his money home every night in a leather wallet. He liked a good table but no extravagant household gear. His wife, Mary, inherited a thousand dollars in gold from one of her Smith kin, and with this she fixed up the house to suit her. She was the great-granddaughter of General Dickson, a Major at King's Mountain and so one of the heroes there. As for my great-grandfather there is so little directly to go on. Oblivion is like the oncoming tide, ceaseless, implacable, triumphant. A daguerreotype shows him a man in late middle years, full of flesh, a walking stick in his hand, slick from use, looking out of his one eye. It was the sort of eye which parts the air. The slave quarters on his lot were brick and two-storied, against the Ransom line. Early in his marriage he bought a cook and a houseboy and their increase brought his holdings up to twelve or fourteen; so there were two families upon his lot, each with its own house and duties, and he with the responsibility. The number of servants must have been an embarrassment to a man of simple tastes and passionate opinions. I

know one was trained to be a carpenter, and Aunt Tene told me he was worth five thousand dollars and spent most of his time away from home on jobs he'd been hired out to do. In the back yard there was a sulphur well and all the advantages of a small farm.

Joseph Nelson emigrated from Prince Edward County, Virginia, near Farmville, early in the century, to live for a while at Lebanon as a tanner. This kind of work offended his sensibility and so he returned to Murfreesboro, to become a druggist. At eighty he had every tooth in his head and no fillings, but no hair on his body. The hair had not worn away; he just never had had any. To his daughter Lorena, Aunt Tene to us, this made him a rare and refined object of nature. She was the youngest of four girls, and the oldest, Aunt Eliza, who must have been an old maid, married Dr. Doty, a New England preacher removed to Louisiana. I have the marriage contract: he gave her as evidence of good faith a plantation in Louisiana and several storehouses on the square in Alexandria which were destroyed in a fire. She always slept upon her side; at least this was the official version after Dr. Doty's death. Whether she rested better so, or whether the ravages of Puritanism, called modesty, afflicted her has brought me to profound speculation. Once I was playing innocently enough on the floor in the back room, lying on my belly. "Get off your abdomen," she said. "Vulgar." Aunt Anne, by me at least called Aunt Nanny, married Uncle Horace Keeble. I must have been very young when she died, but I thought she was beautiful. She was always so kind to children and had Mama's eyes.

Aunt Tene, the baby in the family, thin as a straw but with a clear eye that never mistook its object, in spite of mishandling on the part of her parents and particularly Aunt Doty, lived long enough to outlive one of those old-fashioned "consumptions"—which was merely a medical term of the day for death's affair with life. I think she loved me; I know that during the depression I

used to borrow her burial money to go courting. "You might as well have it," she said. "It looks like I can't die." She was first named for a rich Smith cousin, America Smith. Aunt Doty did not think it a fashionable name, and after the War had it changed to Lorena, that popular song everybody sang in defeat; and the rich cousin cut her out of her will. You don't hear of being cut out of a will much these days, but it was an ever-present threat a hundred years ago. I was quarrelling once with my father, a little hot but not angry, and he said, "You better watch out with old people. They'll cut you out of their wills." "It matters little now, Lorena," but it did then surely, for she was not allowed to marry Dutch Alexander, the man of her choice. He went away to Chattanooga and did well. I'm told he became a great admirer of Woodrow Wilson and raised up in his front yard a statue to this great man, soldered in the finest of tins.

To balance the sexes they had four boys, and with them the male line died out, for none of them married. The oldest was named for William Lytle, the son of John and the oldest grandson of the Captain. He was a militia general and kept a tavern on the south side of the square. He and his wife, Mary, a cousin of the Nelsons, were great friends of Joseph and Mary. They loved their namesake and practically took him to live with them at the tavern. Having no children of their own, they spoiled and petted him to death. He died of drink at the age of eighteen. Who can say what guilt or sorrow made his mother realize that she had no picture of him; so the coffin was brought upright and the picture taken. He had a sweet face, as well as you could make it out with the eyes closed. He seemed so forlorn, upright but not standing, all in his homespun best. He was dug up years later, to be shifted to other ground in the new cemetery. There was a glass in the coffin lid, just over his face. He looked as he looked when he was first shut in, and everybody marvelled to see him so natural and so untouched by death, until a pick accidentally crushed the glass. Instantly his face sank into a growing water and there disappeared.

Robert, serving in General Morgan's cavalry, was killed in Georgia. Handsome, with a strong and sensuous face, he looks more nearly like my cousin John Nelson than anybody else in the family. Two other brothers, Matthew and Joseph, did not drink themselves to death until their middle years. They lived above the drug store, and the barrel of fine whiskey which all drug stores carried then stood in the back of the building, handy to thirsty and lonely bachelors. I think it was Joe, with his pop-eyed handsome face, who used to fall out in the courthouse yard, just across from the storehouse; and there would be the knock on the door, a word spoken, and Aunt Tene would go up and bring him home, dirty but with a diamond stick-pin shining like ice on his shirt front. He would be put in front of the fire to thaw out, and there she would, at his request, wash his feet.

On the corner, between the brick walk and the house, stood the first milestone on the turnpike to Woodbury. In my childhood one side of the brittle limestone block had been chipped off. Near it stood the fire hydrant, and we used to tie a rope to them and drive at great speeds over dangerous courses this team that never moved an inch. But there was only the milestone that morning in 1863 when Mama was playing around it with other children. Nobody ever knew who he was or why he did it, but a Yankee soldier knelt by the back window in the Mosby house and shot into this group of children, after which he mounted a horse and galloped out of town. The bullet struck Mama. At the time Miss Mattie Ready, who had recently married General Morgan, was crossing the street. She could not imagine why a soldier would shoot a child and thought he was aiming at her, but then a man who will shoot a woman in cold blood will shoot a child.

Mama ran into the house to her nurse. The bullet had barely missed the jugular vein; the blood darkened the apple she still held in her hand, and blood was in her shoe. The enemy in the street now invaded the privacy of the house. The curious entered

and stared and confiscated the air; the family came and went as if they were strangers. The child was bleeding to death but could not have a doctor: her father had refused to sign the oath of allegiance to the Lincoln government. His drug store had been confiscated; he had been deprived of his civil rights. These things he had expected but not what he now suffered. Out of compassion a young lieutenant from Kentucky assumed the authority to call in Doctor Wendell. The invader had had its blood; it also took its pound of flesh. A squad of soldiers arrested my great-grandfather and marched him, cursing them, to the Provost's court where he was forced to take the oath. But it did not recover for him or for her their privacy. That night, lying upon her back, she looked upwards towards the abyss. To the child's fevered gaze the long bayonets of the soldiers seemed to reach the ceiling, as they filed past her bed, staring out of their boredom and curiosity.

The child must have felt the all-pervasive power of darkness, for she discovered there is no final refuge, not even at home. The long piercing bayonets came to stand for that which could threaten and invade privacy. It was these she remembered best, even though peace returned to the house and, finally, to the town. Even late in life she was not allowed to forget, for the bone worked out of her jaw in her old age and the velvet ribbon she wore only partially disguised the scar, even as it increased the grace with which she carried her head. This violence to innocence so early, did it give her her great strength, mild and hidden as that strength was? Do I make too much of this?—for the double way and choice afflicts us all sooner or later. Perhaps the excess of the experience at such an age, the direct brutal shock of evil, sank within, to remain there as the ultimate response and guide in time of crisis. I overheard her once in a small polite conversational tone say to the fire department, "I believe my house is on fire."

Perhaps this was it. I can only speak vicariously of violence

known in childhood. It happens to be my last memory of the Parrish house. I was standing in the narrow front yard, alone. Suddenly I was standing in a vacuum: all of the air, sound, even people had been sucked down a funnel whose spout drew south, near the Fairgrounds. I heard, and yet nobody was about to speak it, "Mr. Bob Lytle has been stabbed at the Fairgrounds." I remained for a moment, the core of a silence that was emptiness; then I, too, was made to vanish. The house and yard were banished forever. I have no memory of entering the house again.

Perhaps this was the second forewarning of what an art demands, that present denial of the self and all affective needs, to be resurrected in the work. There was no feeling but an awareness of that necessary distance, to discover in the personal the eternal sense which we call the archetype. It was the same absence of the self I knew, standing on the upper balcony eating Cuticura and watching the fire-horses move through the dark. Of course only now do I know this. Then I did not even know the cause. The Fairgrounds was short of funds and my father, along with the other Commissioners, was keeping gate. The drunken sheriff, Jernigan, demanded that his child and its nurse, as well as himself, enter free of charge. When my father refused and a few words passed, the sheriff drew his knife. My father, hampered by a heavy money sack, turned to the crowd and asked to borrow a pistol, but nobody stepped forward. The sheriff was a known bully and dangerous, or perhaps the witnesses thought it was none of their business. Maybe even they wanted to see blood run. And it did, but not fatally. My father threw up his arm and took the blade which was aimed for the heart. There was an uneven struggle, until the toll-gate keeper ran across the road and pulled the sheriff off. At his trial the twelve good men and true freed him, saying "He is a pore man and Bob Lytle is a rich man." My father, feeling that he worked as hard as any man for his living, was particularly outdone by this. Judge Richardson committed the offender to the workhouse for six



months, and he was promptly allowed to escape, but only into exile, where he remained I suppose for a long time, as permission was never granted for a free return.

This brought the pistol into the house, and I was caught playing with it, as old Doctor Murfree picked up a washcloth, rubbed it over my father's wound, and dismissed him. We weren't so conscious of germs then and relied more on prayer. Doctor Murfree, when he had done all he could medically, would kneel by the bed of the patient and pray. A Saturday on the square a man was stabbed and bleeding badly. The doctor's older son had looked at him and said, "He's gone. Nothing to be done for him," when the old man appeared. He bellowed like a bull, "Get away from here," and the son and the bystanders with their carrion noses withdrew, making an allegorical ring of faith and doubt, as the old doctor knelt in the dust and tobacco spittle of the street, his great shoulders clumsily hovering, the worn black bag open as he dug for his instruments. The large hands, already washed in blood, worked steadily, with no tremor, in a concentration which charged the silence with more than respect or even fear, for the silence still quivered with the passion of faith and that voice. The eyes of the stricken man, beneath the wavering lids, fixed themselves upon the wide brow, bent and glistening with sweat. It was the doctor's prayer, in the dirt of the street, that released them, for the man knew he was saved. And nobody doubted or was ashamed, and for the moment all there were reminded of God's mystery.

But the doctor's nephew and my father's first cousin, Lytle Murfree, was not so lucky. He ran away to Texas and, being a good shot, was on the police force of San Antonio; being also incorruptible as well as a good shot, the only way to get rid of him was for the chief to have him assassinated in a dark place. And so he died alone, without prayers or medical attention. I was told this as the pistol was taken from me, by way of warning, while at the same time I was not to say that I had a cousin who

had been a policeman. I was greatly abashed by this, as I could think of nothing better, unless it was to be fire chief.

At any rate the pistol disappeared, but does violence vanish so easily? Does not every act, either in the head or by the hand, leave its scar upon the flesh or spirit? All except one. There is one wound that never leaves a scar, for it never goes away. The wound of love may close upon its surface but it is always agape inside. Lytle Murfree is the name of two families. If he had a given name, it was not used. The two families had known each other in North Carolina and more closely in Tennessee. There was mutual respect and intimacy. When Captain Lytle gave the land for the town, he had the town named for his former colonel, most of whose grant land was in Williamson county, where Colonel Murfree resided. Mammy's oldest sister's marriage to Uncle Hal Murfree was the first instance which connected the two families. It seemed to all concerned—that is, as families went—a good marriage. Uncle Hal was the best-educated man in the county. He had four degrees, one of them from a German university, a thing rare enough for the times. He had plantations in Mississippi and property in Rutherford. Besides, the two seemed temperamentally fitted. The Murfree men were slow-moving and heavy-footed. So was Aunt Mary. The Lytles were of a nervous temperament and light-footed. Aunt Mary's father, who often played the fiddle for his children to dance, was always saying, "Pick up your feet, Mary." And so the outward signs were good.

Their wedding was a double wedding. Mammy and my grandfather married at the same time. It took place September 12, 1865, in the upswing after the war, before the states of the Confederacy were completely ruined by the Reconstruction, which was not as bad in Tennessee as it was in the lower South. But defeat is bad enough at any time, and my grandfather must have found himself bereft and lonely. His first wife had died and his two sons died during the War; and, although his farm on

the Salem pike was a good farm and not too damaged, a man can't live alone in the country. So the occasion promised well for all, and the cheer of a new life was great. No doubt there was some restriction upon food and drink, but Grandma, Mammy's mother, was a good manager and so her hospitality suffered little. The kin and connection drove the seven miles out from town, and the railroad trains drew up on the siding in front of the farm and blew their whistles, while the little colts, all affrighted, galloped after their mammies, their small tails straight out behind. Mammy was young—the Lytle girls felt they were old maids at fifteen—so young that she was called in from running down the chickens for the wedding dinner, lest she fall down and bruise her knees. But she was not so young as not to know what to do in the crisis which arose.

In the midst of all this preparation a rider waited behind the barn to flout, not join these two families more closely. It was Mr. Hord, waiting for the word to ride forward and steal Aunt Mary away. She made the mistake of telling Mammy. Mammy said, "I'm going to tell ma. You are not going to ruin my wedding, what with the Murfrees here and all." And so the double wedding took place. Neither marriage prospered. My grandfather died early. Uncle Hal let the Mississippi plantations go for taxes, although this was during the Reconstruction and perhaps he couldn't help himself; but his local affairs did not prosper either. I'm afraid he drank too much. Too many inadequacies and sorrows have been put to whiskey and fine spirits. Drinking too much is either an access of spirit or a solace for sorrows too great to bear. The barrel was always overflowing in political races. Aunt Mary took it as an affront when Uncle Hal ran for Squire, and talked against him. She was so vehement that old Doctor Murfree felt it necessary to ask my father to vote for him. My father never expected to do anything else, he said. Uncle Hal was elected and Uncle Jack made up a song about "Ma's sons-in-laws". It ran:

Lytle the farmer,  
Murfree the squire,  
Cannon the merchant  
and Nichol the liar.

But somehow Uncle Hal never seemed to take hold. Uncle Jack, his brother-in-law, stepped down one day from Guggenheim's saloon and found him shaving a dead hog with his razor. Uncle Jack regarded him and then spoke through his cleft palate, "Well, four diplomas and let the hairs set and shaving a hog with a razor."

Did Aunt Mary give her first child the two family names deliberately, and did he run to his death in the West, fleeing what he had found at home? Did the wear of life make all forget and forgive? Mammy was long widowed. At least Aunt Mary, before she died of elephantiasis, had a longer married life.

Maybe Lytle Murfree's flight got in the blood a long time ago, for the Lytles (or Lytil as it was then spelled) were border people in the old country and stole sheep and women from both the Scots and English. And had to keep on the move. Seven of them were put to the horn in the debatable land for not paying their tithes. It must have been the enemy's church, for to be put to the horn was outlawry. The culprit was taken to the cross roads and the horn blown three times each way, and at a certain moment in the ceremony he was read out of society. The genesis of this no doubt was the Druidic ceremony of excommunication, which was an expulsion from both worlds, in life and afterwards.

Every tribe had a Sword of the Tribe. Neither this nor any other weapon could be unsheathed in the congress of the tribe, or in any meeting of Druids or bards. But when an individual was about to be excommunicated, not until after a year and a day, the time allowed for voluntary atonement, was he brought before the tribal assembly and the sword of the tribe was unsheathed in his presence. It was unsheathed against the offender by name.

His name was then struck from the roll of the tribe and from the roll of his own family. The badge of the tribe was torn from his arm, his sword broken in the ground and his wand over his head. All of this was done by the chief. His head was then shaved and the executioner, with the point of this tribal sword, drew blood from his forehead, breast, and loins; then, pouring it over his head, exclaimed: "The blood of the man thus accursed be on his own head." His forehead was branded and he was led forth, the herald going before him, crying out, "This man hath no name, no family, no tribe, among the names and families and tribes of Britain. Henceforth let no man's flesh touch his flesh, nor tongue speak to him, nor eye look upon him, nor hand of man bury him. Let the darkness of Annwyn again receive him."

If this is not a curse I never heard one. The total isolation from humankind left the outcast but one thing to do, crawl into the bushes and die. The terror of this to the tribe, intensified by the ceremony, must have renewed their sense of common life, binding together the families afresh in their bonds and laws. The family in early Britain was the community as it never has been since. It was understood that human nature thrived best fixed in the natural order. Even when land was lost by debt or for other reasons, it could be recovered generations later by the proper payment, if the genealogical descent could be satisfactorily proven. Today the perversion of meaning, time equal to space, does a lot to confuse us all. Time measured as speed obliterates; space as dirt and location sustains and saves. The Christian sense of time and space is almost gone—time the illusory moment in which to play out the drama of salvation or damnation, space the physical ground for the action.

There is some hope in spite of the selfish poor-spirited who rule, for no state has found a satisfactory substitute for a community of families. By its nature the family is hierarchical. It is this hierarchy which gives freedom, for unless you know where you belong in the divisions of order, you lack the conventions of

intercourse. It is function maintained by manners which alone gives freedom. Wherever you are, you know who you are; and when you act, you act instinctively out of this knowledge. When Lee was asked at Appomattox, "General, what will history say if you surrender this army?", he replied: "If it is right for me to surrender this army, I will take the responsibility." This is the Christian response. The servile state always thinks of history, man judging man, because it does not believe in any divine power, in spite of pretenses toward this belief. It believes in abstract power. It equates the abstraction Democracy with the abstraction Equality, and this results in blind obedience to the struggle between partisan interests. Anything executed by the human will, unrestrained by divine ordinances, is of necessity selfish and therefore partial, and hence incomplete. It is this incompleteness which is Satan's domain. Puritans are always incomplete men, composed of will and intellect. Lacking love, they can express themselves only through power. This power acts by putting evil in the object, not in the human heart where it resides. Denying God's plenty, they rebel against His charity towards mankind.

The great Puritan Cromwell reduced the border to his will; and this set families adrift. Along with so many our family moved to Ireland, came to Pennsylvania as Scotch-Irish, then into North Carolina where they stayed until after the Revolution, when we moved into Middle Tennessee to take up land grants. Since Christendom broke out of the bastion which was Europe and began to scatter its parts over the world—and our frontiers were merely late examples of this—there has come into being this stress: the settling of people into communities, the flight from the family. The Wilderness for us has always had a deep appeal. It was the raw energy released by this appeal, which was not without its own discipline, meeting the inherited mores and manners of Europe, which produced so quickly a stable society in Kentucky and Tennessee and other places. Domestic slavery hastened the settling and gave the Old West the look of long habitation in

fixed places. The Nelsons more recently have shown all the settling virtues and the love of town rather than country. They lived two blocks from the square and would really have preferred to camp on the Court House steps. My mother's idea of a farm was a sink-hole for money. Once when my wife Edna and I were coming in to Murfreesboro late from Sewanee, my Aunt Mary said to her, "You poor child. You have married a Lytle. You will be on the big road the rest of your life."

All this moving was against my wife's principles and feelings, but she was that rare woman who could reconstruct from folly the imaginative impulse which gets lost in the act. Right now, when I feel heady over some inconsequential vanity, I see her with the neatness, the care, and that grace which was hers, putting away things and writing on the outside of the package what it held, against our return from wandering. This is all I need to restore me to my proper self, her quiet reproof against the disruption of family life which moving is, the more poignant for her silence. I told myself I was moving about to get the girls educated and fed, since I never made a proper living at my proper work; but maybe I was just telling myself this. Maybe I inherited the restlessness from my father. At a minstrel show in Murfreesboro Mr. Jim Reed said, "Bob Lytle moves every Tuesday." Everybody laughed, including my father. The laughter was a choral reproof, almost a mark of jealousy, for why should anybody want to leave Murfreesboro, except to go out into the country where he reasonably might have business, or to hunt? The Lytles and their connections had been in the county before it was a county. The reproof lay just here: there was something frivolous in being always on the move, when the family was so well located and connected. There were the undertones of a shiftless tenant family, or a colored family not able or willing to pay its rent and so having to move, because the door had been lifted from its hinges. This was the way Squire Leach sometimes evicted a stubborn renter. All of this added spice to

the laughter. Like all good humor it had a barb in it. My father in his arrogance laughed loudest of all.

He didn't miss the point. He didn't mean to be isolated by the barb, and so he laughed too. He told me once never to let your enemy know he has hurt you; it gives the enemy a double pleasure. If you show nothing, he can't be quite sure. In the play of wits I once thought I had him at a disadvantage. We batched at Cornsilk, his farm near Guntersville, after my mother's death. The house wasn't much. I don't think we had an indoor toilet; or if we had by this time put in the Sears-Roebuck affair, we didn't always have water for it. And the outdoor one was nothing to brag on; it was awfully windy and, though back of the hill, too public. Anyway men moving out from breakfast usually hunt the south side of a tree. Old Mr. Jordan was in the hospital in Birmingham, constipated and too shy to let the nurses give him an enema. "If only I could smell pine straw," he said, "I'd make it." My father was having prostate trouble and kept a coffee can under his bed. One morning he "broke" from bed and picked up his shoe instead of the can. "Are you getting senile, not to know the difference?" I asked. "No," he said. "I thought a hog had got in the house and mashed it."

He was referring to a storm we had had, one of those hurricanes that blow up from the coast in winds of varying degrees of destructiveness. When the house began to shake, we took to the storm pit, an uncomfortable place to be. Shortly afterwards the wind looked to abate somewhat and so we returned to the house. No sooner there than the house shook and trembled, but not from the wind. An old sow had got under it and was scratching her back against the sills.

This kind of humor, escaping a disadvantage and enjoying it, is not so common today. Being able to outwit your companion in a trade gave as much pleasure as getting the best of it. Mr. Jim Reed enjoyed his life and prospered. Nothing seemed to get him down. Even as an old man with a broken back and a second



wife with asthma, his courage and resiliency and his unceasing interest in those about him never deserted him. He was a great man in the church. I'm not saying he wasn't religious, but I imagine he enjoyed the sinners so pious and ringing out with such song on Sundays. My grandfather Nelson preferred the club on Sundays, where he could make his sharp choral comments on people and the doings of the town. He was a man who disliked the crude, the too simple faith of the frontier churches, lasting beyond their time and not improving much. There was no proper church of ritual and dogma in Murfreesboro to attract him. He liked to expose the follies and frailties of the churchgoers—that is, the men churchgoers. I asked for a nickel to go to Sunday school. He wondered if a penny wouldn't make as much noise in the pan. He borrowed a rope from Mr. Reed to put up a sawmill smokestack and it broke. He explained the matter and said he wanted to pay for it. When Mr. Reed thought too long, Papa said very piously, "Now, Jim, remember Jesus is looking at you." Mr. Reed turned around and walked away, both of them enjoying the silent repartee, for both of them were acting their parts, making the raw emotions and needs and appetites into a drama which gave not only an intensity to life but a proper dignity. This was not enough to replace the fullest unity which had been shattered in the Renaissance, that time of the multiplication of churches, each of which held one or two fragments of doctrine or dogma and so exposed the poverty of belief and the blind guidance of the shepherds.

Mr. Reed had a great many children and when he was going to be away for several days, he would line the boys up on the back porch and give them certain things to do. When he came to Ellis, he said, "Whatever you start to do, don't do it." His oldest son, whose name I've forgotten, went to West Point and into the army. The old army of the days of peace taught officers and men "theirs not to reason why" and if not to die, to do literally what they were told. This son decided to get out of the

army but found it hard to get the army ways out of himself. Mr. Reed conferred with my father about what to do with him. He had taken him to a rich country widow and he reported that he made no advances but sat there "and turned his head like a slow Jack". Of course Mr. Reed did all the talking and didn't give the boy a chance. My father offered to go in the sheep business with him on Pilot's Knob, the tallest knob in the county and at the top of which my father had planted an apple orchard. At its base were wonderful woods full of hickory and chestnut trees. We would go there in the fall of the year and gather nuts for the winter. I can still smell the sweet-sharp cider and see the drunken bees making zigzag lines in the air as I drank from the mill with delight, for I had a child's taste and didn't like the cider when it got tart. They tried the sheep, but the sheep didn't understand army regulations and the Major lost interest and he and my father decided to dissolve their partnership. He wanted to know how, and my father said, "You take one, and I'll take one." Then he wanted to know, a perfectly proper question, how they could keep the sheep apart, and so not have to do it all over again. "Just paint them," my father said. The Major took this literally and instead of daubing a spot of paint on each, he painted solid green the heads of all his sheep, and the others were gathered in a corner, in terror before their green-headed fellows. What a delight it was to my father to report this. In all good spirit the moving every Tuesday was now checked by the color green.

It was wonderful to play at the Reeds'. There was a barn in the back lot, and we could make tunnels in the hay and suddenly crawl into a secret room. It was like happening upon a treasure. Or if it was raining, play marbles in the upstairs back room, on the rug which had a perfect pattern in its middle to set up the marbles and lines to shoot from. Miss Light, the mother of the family, would go about her domestic duties, even sew in the room, and she never showed that we might be in the way. Arthur was the

youngest and more nearly my age. He was the last of the clutch, as they say in the fowl world, and it wasn't that he wasn't looked after, but Miss Light had so much to do and so many were coming and going it was long after dark before she missed him. He'd been put to bed with the Hoopers next door, where there were so many children that Miss Roberta maybe didn't always count every night at bedtime. And of course Arthur was delighted to be with so many, of all ages. Arthur was always adventurous. When we roomed together at New Haven, to pick up a little pocket money he used to hire out as a pallbearer. We had never heard of any such thing as paid pallbearers, and it shocked us both. We explained it by saying it was a thing only a Yankee would do, even if most of the people he lifted toward the ground were Italians and not true Yankees. This began to seem to have blackmail possibilities, but I finally promised I wouldn't tell it at home. Now that he is old enough to be an honorary pallbearer, the follies of his youth can do no more than refresh his memory.

After Miss Light died, Mr. Reed got restless. My father would talk to him about his predicament. They would discuss concupiscence and the gifts and virtues of the ladies. One day the widow Kerr was seen walking their way, going to church. She had the best carriage in town and was an elegant lady. He turned away and put his hands before his eyes. "Tell me when she's gone," he said. "I've got so many children and she's got so many, I don't dare look at her." One day he brought up the subject of old Solomon—he and my father spoke of this noble King familiarly—and he said he believed he could handle all thousand of his wives. Such dreams finally resolve themselves in reality. He married a fine-looking woman, with a fine carriage and literary tastes, I believe. The house was done over; he got her a maid (nobody but the Darrows had a personal maid); and all the old men in town washed more regularly and dressed up. Even Papa. He curled his moustache and had little John

in clean clothes and took him by the hand and strolled just before supper time up and down the sidewalk, in front of the Reed house.

But sometimes a man can out-trade himself. She began to have asthma, and one thing and another. When this had gotten sort of habit-forming, my father asked him again about old Solomon. What did he think now? "Well," he says, "I'll be frank with you. I would be compelled to cull them a little. I'd line them all up in a row, and I'd go down it. I'd say, 'Mary you step out.' I'd call Alma to step out and Fatima. I'd cull them down to about seven. Then I'd make the other girls a speech. I'd say, 'Now girls, I'm going to try to visit all of you. But if I don't get there Saturday night, I'll be here Saturday night week sure.' "

There has never been anybody more arrogant than my father or less offensive in his arrogance. There was such an innocence about it—that true innocence all artists must keep, lest they lose the fresh view each time they approach their work. It is knowledge which hardens the artist's vision, not that he can do without it. My father was creator and chief actor in a continuing drama. He had no interest in making a fortune but laid the grounds for several and cast them away as a child does a toy when he tires of it. The moment he brought together man, nature, and circumstance towards the end he had designed, he turned away to some as yet insoluble challenge. At a bank auction he bid on a steamboat, and there was no other bid. "Wait," he said. "Tell them the boat's virtues, those twenty-four cabins, two smokestacks." But Colonel Street finally knocked it down to him. "Well," he said to my mother, "we had a fine stroke of luck this week. We've bought a steamboat." She threw up her hands and said, "We're ruined." His last act was growing twelve acres of roses on the mountain farm. It was his most immaterial act, but he protected himself by saying he would sell the roses on the curb market at Gadsden.

Once his car caught on fire in front of the drugstore at Guntersville. "Are you going to sit there," he said at large, "and let my

car burn up?" It was quickly put out. All he did was point. At Monteagle once, out of season, in that wonderful log house my mother loved so well, when Edna and I were living there on short rations—this was early in the marriage, before any of the children were born—a house nearby caught afire. In those days before the gallantry of the Sewanee fire department and its five hundred and fifty gallons of water, when a house caught it usually burned to the ground. It was late fall and we were trying to cook a turkey in one of those electric boxes, which made it late in the afternoon. I ran to the mall to ring the bell—and there is no more lonesome sound than a fire bell ringing in an empty summer resort. When I got back, breathless, it was all under control. While the distracted householder was wandering about with a blanket in her arms, Edna had sized up the situation, stopped up the sink, found the big pots, filled them with water, and handed them to Franklin, the colored boy who drove my father. Edna kept him in water and my father told him where to throw it. It was a wonderful team. I was as much in the way as the woman who owned the house, in some wonder at the perfect co-ordination between my father and my wife. No words passed. The understanding was deep and unrecognized. I was the more amazed, because in the first years of our marriage, he would never look directly at her, always to one side, as if she weren't really there. It was not until after Pamela was born that he forgave her for marrying his only son.

But it was that look of disdain on his face which remains with me, as he stood in the smoke speaking in his incisive voice, and Franklin following it without a bobble (he was so tall he could almost lift the water to the ceiling), so that not a pot went amiss. It was the smoke of course which gave him that look. But I had seen it before. I saw it on his mother's face, when Mammy was old and going blind and looking for a needle. I saw it again when he was lying in a hospital bed, as I left for the night thinking he had given up. But a nurse annoyed him by keeping on the light and writing letters. She must have thought she was

nursing an old man too sick to care. She was mistaken. When I came in next morning, he said to her, "Now, you give Mister Andrew your time and he'll give you a check. I won't need you any more." She flushed up a little, or "fleshed" up as they say in the country, for she was country born. In that daily and hourly shifting place of pain and sorrow and mercy he had brought his world and sat it down. He gave directions to orderlies as if they were his own hands. The doctor didn't seem to understand the uniqueness of his organism, and he told him to call Doctor Murfree in Murfreesboro who did understand it. Fortunately the doctor was the son of Colonel Douglass, an old friend, and the nephew of Dr. Haggard, who had recommended him as the best bladder plumber in Nashville. The nurse did not come so well recommended. She was just another "hand" who neglected her duty.

In our full-blown technological tyranny you rarely hear the word "hand" any more. It meant a country or town laborer who worked with his hands on farms and at sawmills, wherever or at whatever was required to get the work of the world done, plowing, chopping, picking, any one of the varied and numerous crafts seasonally needed. A hand is related to handicraft, to manufacture before manufacture became a sign rather than a literal transcription of an action—that is, a making or doing by hand. A group of hands is called a "force". When a tenant came to rent land, my father always asked him how much force he had, meaning how many choppers he could put in the patch. Or the man volunteered the information. If he had a good number, he spoke it out with pride, for these trades were never purely economics. If the man boasted of his "force", he was saying what a man he was, and by sympathetic magic he meant that a man who could "git" such a force would "make" a good crop. Manhood was a present force then, and might any time be threatened. An old woman whose name I've forgotten said to me, "Just look at my Johnny, born in the dark of the moon, what a man he made." "Give your time" means in essence the same as punching

a time clock, except that a clock seems—mind you, *seems* only—more accurate. It doesn't really tell how much work has been done; it merely says you were there. I have heard my father listen to his hands account for the time they put in, where they had been, for how long, and what they had been doing while they were there. If they miscounted, he told them about it, for he knew where he had sent them, how long they were supposed to take doing what they had been sent to do. He kept the perfect distance between himself and the hands or anybody else who was involved, for the work was the thing that mattered; and the work was better done when all hands, including himself, kept their respective places. If there was any violation of this convention, he abruptly turned his back; or, if he couldn't do that, the look of disdain settled upon his countenance like a mask. His long mouth set, and he looked beyond as if he were measuring against some absolute judgment the immediate, the temporary miscalculation.

I saw it for the last time after he had been put in his coffin. He died in the hotel at Guntersville, after trying to trade for a dog. In the night his failing heart made so much noise another guest thought it was an old man drunk and called the clerk. When the doctor arrived, he "broke" from bed and advanced to the head of the stairs. "Look at my hands," he said, thrusting them towards the doctor accusingly. "I am dying."

Edna and I, far away in Sewanee, sat up in bed at the same moment. Did the timeless air transmit some final appeal for help, or was it farewell? He gave no sign as I looked down upon the fatal posture, upon the inscrutable mask which once had been his countenance. The thumb the pig had half bit off topped the folded hands. For an instant this mark of an act evoked all his life, but the stillness was too constant for memory. The eyes were lids; the mouth was set in that look of disdain, but it was no longer familiar. What met my gaze suggested no feeling. It did not suggest death. It was sight forbidden sight, fixed by what it foresaw, that formal encounter just beyond the coffin lip.